

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

SUDHA MURTHY'S *MAHASHWETA* AND R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE DARK ROOM*: THE  
QUEST FOR SELF-REALIZATION WITH AN ANTITHESIS

SHIPRA<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. MONIKA BHATNAGAR<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Meerut College, Meerut, U.P., India

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Meerut College, Meerut, U.P., India

\* Email: [shipradahiya907@gmail.com](mailto:shipradahiya907@gmail.com)



Article Received: 18/10/2021

Article Accepted: 07/11/2021

Published online:12/11/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.4.147](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.4.147)

**Abstract**

Literature has affected the lives of people in various ways. It comprises powerful and dynamic language to unveil the inward universe of human beings. The term self-realization is often used in literature which denotes the emancipation of an individual from the feeling of restrictions, conditioned faith, fear of judgment, trouble, anxiety, and yearnings. It consociates with a person's identity for searching his/her true self. This article is intended to display the quest for self-realization featured by Sudha Murthy and R. K. Narayan in their novels *Mahashweta* and *The Dark Room*. The protagonists Anupama and Savitri are not painted with the same brush as self-accepting and audacious nature distinguishes one from the other. The protagonist of Sudha Murthy chooses her unique way to introduce her individuality in the public sphere and evolves out of these adversities, however, the protagonist of R.K. Narayan thrives but yields. The very essence of self-realization on the part of a woman in achieving success and mental peace in life through the selection of roads less traveled has been showcased with an antithesis.

**Key-words** – Self-realization, self-identity, social taboos, subservient, resilient.

**Introduction**

Sudha Murthy and R. K. Narayan both writers portray women's role in the family, society, and many other facets of their life. Their language of writing is impregnated with simplicity and vividness which is extremely appealing to the readers. These writers expose the predicament of the feminine psyche. The novels *Mahashweta* and *The Dark Room* explore the roles of women in society in different shades and give immense pleasure to the reader and leave an undeniable mark on their memory. Through this paper, an attempt has been made to compare the much alike journey of two protagonists

entangled in social taboos and barriers and how they emerge out of them differently.

**Discussion**

Sudha Murthy, the recipient of the Padamashree and R. K. Narayan award in 2006, is a prolific Indian women writer in English and Kannad. She has penned many novels, children's short stories, technical books, and travelogues. She is a woman of many aspects, chairperson of Infosys Foundation, a computer engineer, a homemaker, teacher, and philanthropist. She has a profound sense of people's personalities whom she

encounters in her day-to-day life. Sudha Murthy delineates in her novels a verismo image of middle-class educated women along with the socio-economic and psychological difficulties encountered by them. She has exquisitely depicted the evolution of Indian women with time and their quest for self-identity through her novels. After giving a read to her novels a reader can comprehend trouble, frustration, legitimate yearning, and despair faced by the modern women in Indian society, and simultaneously it instills the reader with courage, hope, and aspirations. The delineation of the reliance and effort to keep up resilient has been elaborated in her novels very beautifully. Moreover, she portrays her female protagonists as educated women who deny bending down in front of suppression and instead choose their own way to live life with self-esteem and dignity. Her novels have an intense regional base delving into the lives of vernacular. Through her novels, Sudha Murthy enables the reader to contemplate women's emotions, sentiments, inner conflicts, and dreams.

The novel *Mahashweta* is one of the most quintessential works of Sudha Murthy. In this novel, Sudha Murthy stands as a realist in portraying a living image of a subservient, broken-hearted, suppressed life of a young lady Anupama who later transformed into a bold, courageous, lively, and confident personality. The story deals with the struggle and thrives of a beautiful Indian lady, trapped by leukoderma (vitiligo), and the misfortune she undergoes in the hands of a cruel and insensitive society of India. *Mahashweta* is a story of an educated, skillful, lively, and theatre-loving middle-class lady named Anupama. Dr. Anand, a person from an opulent family got mesmerized by her physical beauty and decides to marry her. He convinced his mother Radhakka of this proposal, who half-heartedly agreed to this marriage considering the poor economic background of Anupama. After marriage Dr. Anand settled in England for higher studies leaving Anupama behind, asking her to join him later. But time had something else in its store for her and she found a white patch on her foot which was later diagnosed as leukoderma, due to this she was going through an emotional and physical ordeal. She could not share

this with her in-laws (Radhakka and Girija) as they hold some grudges against her due to her poor economic background. Later, Radhakka got to know about her disease and start treating her like an untouchable, start making her feel inferior and deficient. That home became emotionally abusive towards her as her in-laws kept attacking her self-esteem. She faces remissness and apathy from her family and was finally forced to leave home. She made innumerable efforts to contact her husband in search of his emotional support but all in vain. Furthermore, even at her father's home, she could not live peacefully due to the conservative mindset of her stepmother and society. She was sick of believing that she is a burden and curse upon her father and family. All the agonizing situations forced her to ponder suicide, but she was rescued by some divine savior and here we see the emergence of a new woman into a new avatar. Sudha Murthy shows the firm determination of Anupama towards life and presents her as an embodiment of courage and confidence. Sudha Murthy quotes "Whatever the circumstances she found herself in, she would meet the challenge head-on and win. She was now ready to face the world, determine to stand on her own feet, and build a new life for herself. She looked back and prayed to the goddesses, give me the courage to live no matter what happens, and started walking home" (*Mahashweta* 79).

Anupama springs as a new incarnation of a courageous woman. She realizes her true self, a state in which she understands who she is. By making a new vision she decides to move on, in her life against all hypocrisies, barriers, hardships, and setbacks. She was ready to learn how to unlock her capabilities as she had realized that she is more than her looks, more than her scars and this is how her journey to success begins from the moment she accepts herself the way she is. Although, she knew things are in the air but this time she gets up deciding that she needs to lead her life in a very strong way. Moreover, she learned that she needs to be gentle with herself and need to turn her sufferings into her strength. Now the feeling of determination and feeling of pain both walked together. She learned a lot from her harsh experiences in life. Anupama states to her friend

Satya: "My experiences have taught me this. I have come to realize that courage and confidence are the real wealth in life. Education can improve your chances of success, but ultimately you have to face life all alone. I don't depend on any guru nor do I read any philosophy. My conscience is my guru and it guides me well" (M 116). Anupama flies to Mumbai and there she transforms into a new personality. Though life keeps on throwing challenges, but she makes herself stronger every day to survive. She deals with a lot of difficulties and harsh realities of life, but she keeps on fighting. In Mumbai, she meets her friend Sumithra and her husband Hari who helped her to get a job, and soon she finds her feet there. There comes another storm in her life when she found that Hari wants to make a clandestine relationship with her in the absence of Sumithra. Anupama was shaken from tip to toe but as she does not want to ruin her friend's life, she didn't reveal it to her and manages to escape from that place. Her heart was brimmed with agony and distress due to this horrible incident. A deep pain, emotional suffering, and isolation enveloped her again. She decides to take another step towards her mental wellness. Fortunately, she was offered the job of a lecturer, she felt very happy, and it seems like she has been given wings and they could never be clipped. She felt like she is on cloud nine when the principal of the college, Father Sebastian, puts a proposal in front of her to direct Sanskrit plays, as she was passionate about theatre from the very beginning. Meanwhile, she encounters a very humble soul, Dr. Vasanth, and his friend Dr. Satya, and they all developed a healthy companionship. Gradually she gets over her mental illness and sufferings. Her emotional scars start healing but the sudden presence of Dr. Anand after so many years causes a shock to her. Dr. Anand was expecting that Anupama will forgive him and they both will share an emotional reunion with each other. But Anupama doesn't reveal any love to him nor she has any expectation from him because she loved him wholeheartedly but in return what did he do with her? He never respected her love and emotions since she was trapped by an incurable disease called Leukoderma after marriage. Physical beauty was more important to him rather than inner beauty.

When she needs her husband's support, he was no longer available there, where was his love and kindness for her at that time? But this time, Anupama has made up her mind, she states:

"I am no longer the naïve Anupama whose world revolved around you. I know what my goals are and where I am heading, and I don't need anyone help to reach my destination. God has been very kind to me. I have been lucky enough to live in a place like Bombay where even this mad rush has a humane side to it. I have excellent friends who trust me and will not hesitate to help me if I am in trouble. All my students are as dear to me as my own children would have been. Their unconditional love has never made me think of myself as blemished. I am not dependent on anyone for emotional or financial support and that has given me enormous strength. I thank god who having been so fortunate" (M 148).

Here we see Anupama who in the initial part of the novel was a very submissive and dependent woman, later transformed into a confident and independent woman, and now she is beautiful on her own terms. When we accept ourselves the way we are, the world recognizes us. Her inner beauty was appreciated by Dr. Vasanth as: "Once beauty is seen in one's nature. A good human being who is compassionate to others, who tries to understand the other person's difficulties and reach out to them in their hour of need has real beauty. Such people should always be cherished and honored" (M 132). Sudha Murthy insists on the inner beauty of mankind which lies not in the external appearance but in one's nature which is permanent. Dr. Vasanth was deeply enamored by the beauty of the Soul of Anupama. Dr. Vasanth states: "Oh God! If only I had known her before her husband ruined her life, I would not have lost this priceless jewel!" (M 151). He puts a proposal of marriage in front of Anupama, she opines, "I am sorry, Vasanth, but please forget your idea. I don't want to get entangled again in the same circle of husband and family. My past has taught me a very valuable lesson...My life must follow a different path" (M 150). The self-realization that Anupama undergoes transforms her into a person who feels complete in herself and is unaffected by the opinions of others about her. Now she is flying like a free bird in the sky

of freedom It's all because of her self-realization and thrives for success. She started smiling, working, and liking herself because she just doesn't see herself from the eye of others.

On the other hand, the next novel, *The Dark Room* by R. K. Narayan, is one of his masterpieces. R. K. Narayan, one of the prominent authors of early Indian Literature in English, has penned many novels and short stories. He was honored with Sahitya Academy Award in 1958. He received the Padma Bhushan in 1964 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2001. He is a pure artist who bestows an offbeat place to the human relationship in his creations. His works give aesthetic contentment at the same time he keeps close to the surface reality. The theme he has chosen for his novels are human relationships, conflicts between tradition and modernity, familial relationships, and education. Narayan portrays his protagonist's rebellion against their family and relations. While many of them are depicted as deep-seated in the ritual conventions, believes, superstitions, and customs of their family. Hence, each of his characters is given unforgettable recognitions to make them lively. The gallery of his female protagonists is diverse by several shades and hues. His heroines emerges from the soil of suffering as they are fragile, and their life is bound by rules and regulations. He discovers women are more traditional than men. He gives importance to chastity in marital relations.

The novel, *The Dark Room* is an account of an unlucky, docile, and gentle housewife Savitri, controlled and disregarded by her husband. Savitri is the picture painted by Narayan as a woman who epitomizes the best in Indian traditional womanhood. Savitri feels trapped in the house as she must follow every command of her domineering husband. Her husband Ramani is an eccentric and arrogant person who does not care for the feeling and expectations of his family. He treats her just like a servant and often used to even humiliate and yell at her by saying that she is made only for the kitchen and not to intervene in any matter. Savitri is a passive soul of domestic violence who suffers everything silently. The situation descended into utter chaos when she gets to know the illicit relationship of her husband with Shanta Bai working

in his office. She realized that she has been treated like a puppet, even though she remained devoted to her husband and children. She tolerated her husband's comments and insults silently without complaining about anything. She made all the possible efforts to win his heart, but she was rebuked for something she was not responsible for. Moreover, Savitri hardly recovered her equilibrium and wants him to come to his senses but Ramani resists. This act of Ramani hurt her pride to such an extent that she firmly picked her own decision to leave the house. She makes a desponded trial to take her children with her, but Ramani objects, and she leaves alone. Before leaving she tosses her wedding necklace down and asserts: "Do you think I'm going to stay here? we are responsible for our position: we accept food, shelter, and comforts that you give and are what we are. Do you think that I will stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here and eat the food you buy with our money? No, I'll starve and die in the open under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no men" (*The Dark Room* 113).

It seems that the marriage system in India in the past had been framed basically to mortify the female. The trauma she undergoes is something beyond interpretation. She has seen a jaundiced view of marriage. So, the journey of Savitri seems very pathetic. She sulked in the darkroom of the house like a dummy. Finally, she left the house and plunged into the Saryu River but was rescued by a burglar-cum-blacksmith named Mari. He brings her along with him to his house and introduces her to his wife Ponni. Savitri rejects to accept charity from anyone as she wants to earn her livelihood by working to live respectfully. So, she started working in the temple now she gets the self-realization that in her husband house she was not only a victim of domestic violence, but she was having the bread of disrespect and the darkroom of that house disconnected her from the freedom of the outside world, now she is not only earning her livelihood respectfully but also inhaling the air of freedom. As time progresses, she was preyed on by the orthodoxies of society and her confidence was shaken to the limit that she finds herself helpless to protest the situation. Hence, she soon starts

yearning and longing for her children. Narayan depicts her mental state as: "Perhaps Sumati and Kamala have not had their hair combed for ages now..." (TDR 190). She figures out her helplessness and dependency on men as she states: "If I take the train and go to my parents, I shall feed on my father's pension; If I go back home, I shall be living on my husband's earnings, and then on Babu" (TDR 93). She decides to cease the battle for freedom and self-respect and her progressive motion fell surprisingly. She chastises her destiny, accepts the defeat, and surrenders. She confesses: "This is defeat, I accept it. I am no good for this fight" (TDR 190). Ironically, she expresses her predicament in such words "I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it" (TDR 155). Finally, she surrendered to her present circumstance and return to her house. She is happy to see her children, but things are still the same, and Ramani's attitude towards Savitri is not changed at all and he still pays cold shoulder to her.

The story depicts the journey of an obedient wife and caring mother who suffers silently, swallows all insults and injustice by her obnoxious husband but raises her voice when a terrible turn comes in her life of sharing her husband with another lady. She revolts against it as this attacked her self-esteem and she left the house for the protection of her self-respect. She begins to work to earn her livelihood respectfully. She was realizing herself but ironically, her self-realization could not reach its goal as she quits, pockets her pride, and return to the same suffocating environment. No doubt her arrival glorifies her image as a mother but at the cost of her independence and self-respect. Nevertheless, they realized that education is a crucial part of a human being and dependency is a curse. Hence, she decides that her daughters must be educated so that they do not face the same burden of living life which is dependent upon someone.

Narayan's protagonists' revolt against convention and society but as time advances they immediately start realizing the tininess of the universe, come back into the same old world. Savitri is not bold enough to accept the challenges thrown

by life. She bends the knees in front of them and accepts things as they are.

### Conclusion

Generally, Indian women in the past identify themselves as subordinate beings, they were marginalized and subjugated since they were not aware of their rights, potential, and inner strength. Through the novel *Mahashweta*, Sudha Murthy delivers a strong message that the women of the present era are not fragile and reliant but confident, empowered, and can assert their own identity in this patriarchal society. Sudha Murthy delineates the character of Anupama who has obtained serenity through suffering and stood as an epitome of courage to the stigmatized. She discovered her inner strength, potential, self-realization, and self-acceptance only after harsh agony. Anupama who in the initial part of the novel was emotionally vulnerable, cursing her fate and even contemplating committing suicide and finally listens to the voice of her inner spirit and discovers a new version of herself and waves off her past, and starts her life with a new fresh. Instead of sitting idle and mourning she decided to reshape her life by herself. Sudha Murthy has given a very clear-cut message thorough the novel, that acceptance, proactive vision and education are the key to the state of happiness and self-satisfaction. The novel ends with a fruitful message by Sudha Murthy that realization of one's potential and inner strength leads to a happy and successful life. On the contrary, R. K. Narayan does not show his protagonist Savitri, enhancing her pledge of being independent and she compromises under the circumstances. Though she is aware of her self-esteem and she also wishes to establish her own identity, but she discovers herself unable to protest them. Whereas Anupama is firmly determined towards her goal which is why she succeeds to make her own identity. To this comparative approach from the characters of Anupama and Savitri, we have analyzed that how one sees a potential and opportunity in calamities and another impasse out of the frying pan into the fire.

---

**Works Cited**

Murthy, Sudha. *Mahashweta*. New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2007.

Narayan, R. K., *The Dark Room*. Chennai, Indian Thought Publications 1938.